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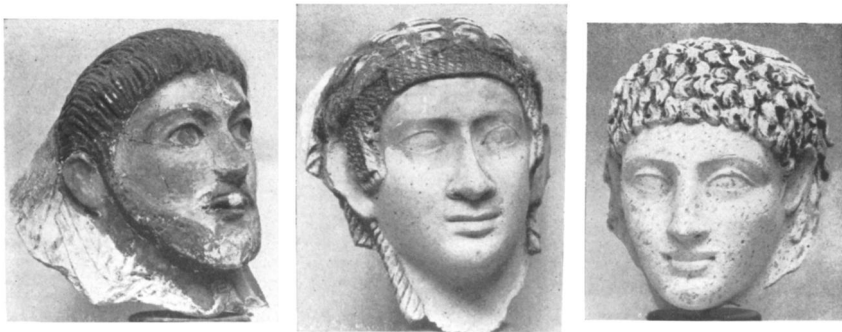
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GRÆCO-EGYPTIAN PLASTER MASKS FROM MUMMY-CASES
FIRST TO THIRD CENTURY A.D.

GRÆCO-EGYPTIAN PORTRAITS

THE Museum has recently acquired by purchase in Egypt seven portrait-panels of the so-called "Fayûm" type, which have now been placed on exhibition in the Room of Recent Accessions.

These panels, both in execution and condition of preservation, are excellent examples of the ancient method of painting in wax (encaustic) described by Pliny,* which has survived only in the panel portraits of this type found in the Græco-Roman cemeteries of Egypt, particularly in those of the Fayûm district. In all cases such panels bear portraits of the deceased and were inserted over the face of the mummy, either in a decorated cartonnage mummy case in which the body was inclosed or in an ornamental arrangement of thick linen bands with which it otherwise was wrapped.

Their use in this manner was derived directly from the ancient Egyptian custom of providing the mummy with a mask though this had always been of a purely conventional type. From the period of the fifth or sixth dynasty, when the first evidence occurs of any attempt by the Egyptians to preserve the body, they had ornamented the burial with this painted headpiece or mask of cartonnage or canvas and stucco. Likewise this attempt to represent the features and form of the

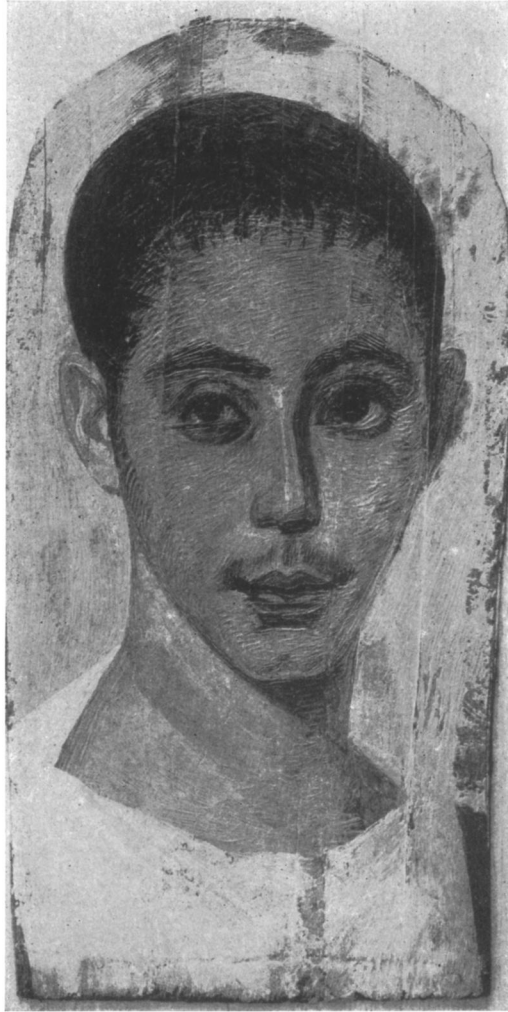
deceased, however conventionally, had been embodied in the full cartonnage case and in the anthropoid coffin, with its human features and outlines. But in no case were the masks or other like representations in the slightest degree realistic. They constantly held to the same conventional regularity of feature, with simply the customary variations of head dress, ceremonial beard, or ornament, according as the person represented was man or woman.

With the ending of the native dynasties and the beginning of Ptolemaic and Roman rule, the Græco-Roman settlers in Egypt adopted the Egyptian practice of mummification, though it found no reason in their own religious beliefs. In fact, the custom was continued through the Roman period even after the adoption of Christianity, and recent investigation has furnished clear evidence that some attempt, at least, to preserve the body was made as late as the sixth century A.D.

The adoption of mummification by these Hellenic inhabitants produced no radical change at first in the accessories of the burial with which we are concerned, and it is not until the first century A.D. that the first fairly Hellenized masks occur. Almost simultaneously with them the portrait panels seem to appear.

The masks of this period are modeled almost entirely in plaster, in some cases lying flat over the face of the mummy and in other cases projecting above the head in a partially upright position. In style, they

* *Nat. Hist.*, XXXV.



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are obvious products of classical art, both in feature and in the rendering of the hair and other details. Some are clearly strong attempts at portraiture, while others seem to fall into more conventionalized types. Our Museum possesses thirty-eight of these masks, acquired in 1900, of which examples are shown in the headpiece. Such masks have been found in cemeteries of the period in nearly all parts of Egypt, and even at the Oasis of Kharga, but the Fayûm dis-

trict seems to have been the particular section in which the portrait panels were in vogue, so far as present evidence goes.

External evidence as to the exact dating of both these forms is somewhat meagre. In 1887-8 a cemetery at Hawara, excavated by Flinders Petrie, yielded our principal data on the subject, and his conclusions form one of the main bases of our knowledge.* Investigation of the ques-

* Cf. Petrie: *Hawara, Biabmu, and Arsinoë*.

tion through a study of the details of the masks and portraits themselves, such as the arrangement of the women's hair and the types of jewelry, has more recently been carried out by Edgar,* who arrives at conclusions similar to those of Petrie. Both the masks and portraits seem most certainly to belong principally to the second century A.D., appearing in the latter part of the first century and lasting till the early part of the third century.

The portrait panels follow the plaster masks closely in the types of portraiture represented, but in their realism, freedom of treatment, and masterly rendering the former far excel. In many cases, no doubt, it is a question as to how far they may be regarded as faithful likenesses of the persons they were intended to represent. One interesting panel in the Cairo Museum, which has the painter's memoranda on the back regarding the manner in which the features of the person were to be represented, makes it certain that sometimes they certainly were not painted directly from the individual. As works of the later schools of classical art, centered in Alexandria, they have fortunately survived to us, however, as admirable examples of the perfection in technique and execution attained in portraiture by the artists of the Hellenistic period.

These portraits are usually painted on thin wooden panels in encaustic, as is the case in our seven examples, but they occur in distemper also and sometimes partly in encaustic and partly in distemper. There has been considerable controversy as to the exact method employed in the application of the wax colors, for the passage in Pliny is obscure and has been variously interpreted. On certain sides, however, the method of procedure is plain. Often the panel was first sized, although in other cases the paint was applied directly to the wood. After the colors had been mixed with molten wax they were applied to the panel while in a fluid condition. In most cases it is clear that the background and drapery were

painted with the brush, but in the case of the flesh and hair the paint is generally thicker and shows a different treatment. Here the wax has been worked over with a hard, pointed instrument, the imprint of which has been preserved in a wonderfully fresh condition in our portrait shown in the frontispiece. On the same panel, too, it may be seen that the finer details of the



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hair and eyelashes were applied afterwards with a fine brush.

Much of the doubt as to the method employed in the treatment just mentioned has been dispelled by the recent investigations made in the technique of encaustic painting

* Cf. *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1905, p. 225 ff. Also, *Catalogue général du Musée du Caire: Græco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits*, par C. C. Edgar, Cairo, 1905.



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by the painter Berger,* and his identification, among the Naples bronzes, of the *cestrum*, the instrument mentioned by Pliny as used in the process. It has one end shaped like a spoon and in this the colors were evidently held to melt over the fire. They were then poured over the panel, and the long handle, shaped at the upper end for the purpose, was used to level the colors and emphasize the lines of the portrait.

Although these portraits are generally painted on wood, yet they sometimes occur

* Cf. *Beiträge zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Malertechnik*, II, p. 50 ff.

also on canvas or linen, of which perhaps the best example is the well-known portrait of Aline in the Berlin Museum.* From this type of portrait head on linen seem to be derived the full-length portraits on linen, completely covering the burial, of which our Museum has also recently acquired an example seen on page 69. This portrait is painted in distemper, and from its style must fall into the same period in date as the portrait panels and masks.

A. M. L.

* Cf. *Antike Denkmäler*, 1893-4; also *Königliche Museen zu Berlin: Aegyptische und Vorderasiatische Alterthümer*, pl. 60.



FIG. 10



FIG. 7



FIG. 11

EARLY CHINESE POTTERY IN THE MUSEUM

THE hitherto ephemeral interest in the ancient families of Ju, Kuan, Ko, and Ting, was doubtless the result of a not unnatural feeling of hesitation inspired by the apparent hopelessness of a quest for veritable early examples of those oft-discussed types.

Yet to-day the market could supply the needs of the collector, for it has lately been possible to find examples of the early wares running in date anywhere from the Han dynasty—the so-called mortuary wares—to the Sung and Yuan dynasties. The Han ware appears in two well-defined types; the first perhaps anterior to the date usually assigned to it; but at any rate beginning with the early Han; the second usually assigned to the period immediately preceding the Sung, yet similarly without doubt to be attributed to an earlier date.

The first class is represented by the large red-bodied mortuary jars (fig. 1) with cylin-

dric necks, and globular bodies often covered with an oxidized malachite-green glaze. In glaze and form these pieces imitate early bronzes—the resemblance of the malachite glaze to that sometimes met with on the older bronzes being at times most deceptive. Besides the jars of this form there are various objects similarly funerary in character, such as models of houses or huts surrounded in some cases by miniature walls, which sometimes shelter a flock of sheep or of goats, men on horseback, symbolic perhaps, as with the Japanese during the age of the dolmen, of the servants or companions of the departed, and figures of archaic-looking lions, and other wild beasts, birds of prey, or the domestic hen sitting upon its nest.

The second type consists of certain tall mortuary vases of a yellowish-gray paste, having rounded or ovoid bodies, long, flaring necks, and high, bell-shaped covers. Specimens of this type are embellished with molded designs affixed to neck and cover, like the example shown in fig. 2, where the